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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW ROK NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR SEEKS CLOSE  
COOPERATION ON ALLIANCE ISSUES

REF: SEOUL 4073

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) During a call on newly appointed National Security Advisor Baek Jong-chun, the Ambassador and NSA Baek agreed to cooperate closely in resolving alliance issues, such as OPCON transfer and base relocation, and to continue coordination with regard to the Six Party Talks. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador on December 19 paid an initial call on National Security Advisor Baek Jong-chun. As set forth more fully reftel, Baek was most recently President of the government-supported Sejong Institute and is known as a military and security expert. Though Baek's English is quite good, he chose to speak through an interpreter.

NSA BAEK SEEKS CLOSE COORDINATION

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¶3. (C) Baek said that he wanted to continue the close working relationship that the Ambassador enjoyed with his predecessor, current Foreign Minister Song Min-soon. Commenting that the Korean-American relationship had improved over the past year, Baek said he wanted to work with the Ambassador to resolve any pending issues. The Ambassador replied that he was pleased that the two countries had coordinated well in anticipation of the resumption of the Six Party Talks. The two would have to work especially hard to prevent election-year politics from detracting from the accomplishments of the alliance. Agreeing, Baek said that he was committed to depoliticizing alliance issues and resolving them without misunderstandings.

¶4. (C) Baek noted that when he traveled to the U.S. as President of the Sejong Institute, he would often meet with academics in Washington who would tell him that there were many problems with the alliance. He would then meet with USG officials who would deny the problems. Similarly, back in Korea, academics would tell him there were problems and, again, ROKG officials would deny the problems. While such differences in opinion could be expected in a democracy, Baek suspected that part of the problem was public diplomacy. The Ambassador replied that although sometimes there have been problems, the alliance had also been successful in resolving them -- although the path has been somewhat rocky at times. The recently-concluded Special Measures Agreement was a good

example, the Ambassador said.

15. (C) Baek said that in the past, issues that arose between the U.S. and ROK were never disclosed to the public. Now, because Korea has a political system that embodies freedom of speech and an active media, alliance issues readily become fodder for public debate. He agreed with the Ambassador that the USG and ROKG would have to pay close attention to this in the coming election year and attempt to resolve pending issues in advance through better communication.

#### RESOLVING OPCON, BASE RELOCATION

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16. (C) To start, the Ambassador said that the USG and ROKG should within the first months of 2007 agree on a specific date for the transfer of operational control (OPCON) and clear up any misunderstanding regarding the timing of USFK's move from Yongsan to Pyongtaek. The Ambassador hoped also that Baek would use his authority as chair of the cabinet to resolve outstanding environmental issues regarding the bases that had already been returned. The Ambassador pointed out that the USG had complied with the SOFA and had voluntarily taken additional steps to ensure that the land was transferable, so the issue was settled from our point of view. Remaining legal technicalities on the ROK side should be resolved without delay in order to prevent this issue from becoming a political issue in 2007.

17. (C) Baek concurred that the OPCON transfer date should be settled as soon as possible. Blaming the misunderstanding regarding the Yongsan move on poorly informed reporting, Baek said that MND was working on a final draft of the Master Plan (MP) which would include a mutually agreed date. Meanwhile,

Baek said that plans to relocate individual buildings and facilities could proceed without problem on the basis of working-level consultations.

18. (C) The Ambassador suggested that the next SPI meeting would be an opportunity for senior policy representatives to clear up any misunderstandings. It was important to keep the transfer on track to avoid giving the Korean public the impression that the U.S. was reluctant to move, which was not true. It was the U.S. position that USFK should move as soon as possible. Thus, it was important soon to agree to the smoothest and swiftest possible timetable, taking into account the difficulties that had been encountered in acquiring land and facilitating the departure of the local residents. The Ambassador added that it would be important to make clear to the public that there was no linkage between the transfer of OPCON and the move from Yongsan to Pyongtaek, although the events would happen in the same timeframe. Baek agreed that these were entirely different matters and that he also did not want them misunderstood by the public.

#### GRATITUDE FOR IRAQ SUPPORT

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19. (C) The Ambassador conveyed appreciation for the ROKG's efforts to convince the National Assembly to extend the Zaytun deployment in Iraq, which was a welcome demonstration of the ROK's global activities. Baek said that the ROK was making utmost efforts to contribute to global peace and security.

#### NSA URGES PATIENCE WITH NORTH KOREA

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110. (C) Turning to the Six Party Talks, the Ambassador said that the latest reports from Beijing indicated that the North Koreans, in the first meetings on December 18, had taken a maximalist approach, as many had expected. Still, as a result of close coordination among the other five parties in recent weeks, we were able to reach an understanding on the steps we expect the DPRK to take as part of an "early harvest." The key to progress toward implementation of the 2005 Joint Statement would be for the U.S. and ROK, along

with China, to remain united and to coordinate and consult closely. President Roh's clear message to North Korea that rice and fertilizer assistance would remain suspended until there were concrete results was helpful, the Ambassador said.

¶11. (C) Baek said that he wanted to see the North Korean nuclear issue resolved as soon as possible, but based on the DPRK's attitudes as seen on December 18 in Beijing, a resolution would likely take time and patience. Baek said that cooperation between the U.S. and ROK would be very important.

¶12. (C) Asked about public sentiment toward the ROKG's engagement policy in the current environment, Baek said that public sentiment would likely depend on the situation that unfolds in Beijing. The Ambassador emphasized again that calibrating implementation of the engagement policy to support progress in the Six Party Talks would be the best approach. True, said Baek, but the ROK's absolute goal was to resolve the North Korea nuclear issue in a peaceful and diplomatic way.

VERSHBOW